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# 'Signs' and 'Words': Augustine's Biblical Hermeneutics

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# ‘Signs’ and ‘Words’ ——Augustine’s Biblical Hermeneutics

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## SUMMARY

The aims of this study were to grasp the essence of Augustine’s hermeneutics in *De doctrina christiana* (396/7), and to discuss the problem of language-mediated communication.

The first five chapters discuss the disparity of the language-mediated understanding method between *De magistro* (389/90) and *De doctrina christiana*. The theme that nothing is learned through signs is recognized in *De magistro*; on the other hand, the assertion that things are learned through signs (*res per signa discuntur*) is found in *De doctrina christiana*. This disparity cannot be explained by Augustine’s consistent theory of sign (indicating structure  $\langle \textit{signum} \rightarrow \textit{res} \rangle$ ), but by a development in his theory of words (expressing structure  $\langle \textit{cogitatio} \rightarrow \textit{verba} \rangle$ ). This development is attributed to his gradual understanding of *verbum*, which is fully developed in *De trinitate*, and to the efficacy of delight as God’s grace on testimony about God, discovered in *Ad Simplicianum* (396). According to *De doctrina christiana*, a speaker’s intent can be conveyed to a listener in, not through, his words.

The last two chapters deal with the problem of a criterion for interpreting biblical text literally or figuratively, and the motivating function of biblical interpretation in the seven-stage progress of life.

For Augustine, biblical text should be interpreted toward a kingdom of love, for the benefit of God's community, and can be regarded as a discursive, not intuitive, language in which the intent of biblical writers can be conveyed through the delight of discovery in a figurative reading, motivating readers to advance from the third stage of *scientia* to the final stage of *sapientia*.